



The façade of the island church was decorated at Christmas time with two large and colorful murals depicting a nativity scene with Rapanui overtones.



One of the Chilean wine palms recently brought to the island. It's height can be estimated by comparison with the woman standing to the left of the tree. It is hoped that the palm will become part of a projected botanical garden on the island.

THIEVES ABOUND. A break-in at the Sebastian Englert Museum on Easter Island resulted in the theft of several ancient artifacts, including an eye from a statue that was found during excavations at Tongariki. The culprit was quickly arrested and most of the artifacts recovered.

El Mercurio de Valparaíso

Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor:

Rapa Nui Journal (Vol.13:14-15) March 1999 contains an article by the hobby epigrapher Sergei V. Rjabchikov that purports to "translate" a *rongorongo* tablet from Easter Island.

In this article, the author never discloses the fact that the artifact under investigation, which he calls the "Chicago Fish Tablet", is in fact a tourist reproduction from 1925.

The artifact in question is the "Fuller *ika*" (RR 1), inventory number 273245 at the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, USA. Showing three parallel lines of some 30 glyphs in a mixture of primitive *rongorongo*, *ta'u*, and *mama* figures, it was manufactured on Rapanui in 1925 at which time Captain Alfred Walter Francis Fuller (1882-1961) brought it to London. At no time has the Field Museum ever claimed that this artifact is of ancient provenance. Its value lies in its representation of the carving genre used on Rapa Nui in the 1920s. It is a typical product of this era. Several similar "*ika*'s" were adorning Tahitian collections in the 1920s.

Having been manufactured in 1925 and including a pseudo-"script", the *mama*, that was only elaborated in the 1920s, the "Fuller *ika*" does not hold a text but merely decoration, added to the artifact in order to command a greater selling price. Decoration does not need "translating".

It is most strange that Mr. Rjabchikov does not inform the readers of the *Rapa Nui Journal* of the recent manufacture of this artifact. The only explanation can be that he himself is not aware of it or that he simply chooses to ignore this fact in order to publicize an imaginative "translation". Mr. Rjabchikov's article is neither adequate scholarship nor passable journalism. It is deception.

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Reviews

José Miguel Ramírez A. Patrimonio Cultural y Comunidad en Rapa Nui (Cultural Heritage and the Community in Rapa Nui) In: *Patrimonio Arqueológico Indígena en Chile. Reflexiones y Propuestas de Gestión*. Ximena Navarro Harris and Leonor Adán Alfaro, Eds., Instituto de Estudios Indígenas, Universidad de la Frontera and UNESCO, Santiago, Chile 1998, pp. 125-131, ISBN. 956-236-114-4

Review by A. Elena Charola, Ph.D.

Consultant, World Monuments Fund, Easter Island Program

The book, devoted to the indigenous archeological heritage of Chile, is divided into three sections: Archaeological Heritage, Institutions and Legal Measures; Defense of the Heritage; and Proposals and Initiatives for Management. Within this

last section is the paper by J. M. Ramirez concerning the Cultural Heritage and the Community in Rapa Nui.

The six and half page article presents an excellent analysis of the current situation on the island. Ramírez has the gift of depicting a complex situation in a few bold strokes. The following paragraph has been translated, freely, to illustrate the point: "The revitalization of the Rapa Nui culture and society over the past years constitutes an example of adaptation and survival of a community that was on the brink of extinction towards the end of the last century. Its cultural heritage had suffered progressive deterioration. But external stimuli, such as the restoration of the monuments and the increased interest of the outside world as generated by tourism, awakened the sleeping pride of islanders, prompting new cultural expressions. These began with a newly created 'market' as the island opened up to the rest of the world at the end of the sixties."

Several important points are mentioned in the article. To begin with, the fact that the present Rapa Nui community has widely divergent knowledge of its own oral traditions which, in some instances, can be contradictory—even for those acting as tour guides. But the younger generation is keen on learning, and is thus "recovering" whatever traditional aspects of the culture were documented by foreign anthropologists. Tourism also has served to improve craftsmanship as well as dancing, albeit to Tahitian rhythms. The revival can be said to have culminated with the creation of the Tapati Rapa Nui festival. Over the past fifteen years this festival, managed by the Municipality, has helped to improve the quality of traditional dancing and such things as body painting and the "kaikai" string figures. But the negative effect that the 1966 *Ley Pascua* had on the Rapanui language is also mentioned, since it resulted in a preferential use of Spanish by islanders in order to take advantage of the educational system in mainland Chile.

One of the most important points made in the article, and which is usually not perceived in its entire complexity, is the issue of the land use by the Rapanui, and the conservation of the archaeological and natural heritage of the island. A very brief history of the National Park and its several modifications over the past sixty years is presented, ending with its inclusion in the Cultural Heritage List by UNESCO in 1995. The Park covers 43% of the island, while 33% (5,557 hectares) is held by the Fundo Vaitea, administered by Sasipa (*Sociedad Agrícola y de Servicios de Isla de Pascua*). Only 10% of the island (some 1,688 hectares) corresponds to privately-owned rural sectors. The Government planned to give out an additional 1500 more hectares to the islanders, and the transfer of Sasipa to the local community through the Municipality was approved by the Chilean Senate in 1994. These transfers, however, have yet to take place.

As a consequence of this unresolved issue, hundreds of head of cattle owned by the islanders graze within the Park's lands, progressively deteriorating both monuments and the land itself. And the high demand of sand and gravel for construction, both for private and entrepreneurial construction, poses yet another threat to the archaeological heritage. Meanwhile, public works such as the paving of the south coast road to Anakena constitute a risk that has yet to be evaluated.

Ramírez emphasizes the need for an overall plan, the

Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial, that should bring together the policies outlined in the laws on National Monuments (*Ley de Monumentos Nacionales*), Environmental Framework (*Ley Marco del Medio Ambiente*), Native Populations (*Ley Indígena*), as well as the Management Plan for the Park, the UNESCO Conventions and the 1994 Barbados Declaration on sustainable development in small islands. Such a Plan, giving clear and concise regulations with regard to the use of the land and the preservation of the cultural and natural heritage of the island, would facilitate any productive activities of the islanders within a framework of sustainable development.

He concludes his argument pointing out that, while tourism is at the core of the development of the island, it requires regulation as a function of the conservation needs of the archaeological heritage. And so do the public and private works that, although perceived as progress, may really affect the quality of both the environment and the cultural heritage. For this purpose, he stresses, general policies have to be developed that should be based on a wide agreement between authorities and organisms as well as with the participation of an informed and cognizant community.

Reviews of Veronica Du Feu, 1996, *RAPANUI, Descriptive Grammars*, London and New York: Routledge, have appeared in *Rapa Nui Journal* 10.2 (by Steven Roger Fischer) and in *Oceanic Linguistics* 36.1 (by Ulrike Mosel). For yet another review requested of Bob and Nancy Weber on Easter Island, see the Spring 1999 issue of *Anthropological Linguistics*

Easter Island Foundation News

PROGRESS CONTINUES TOWARD the opening of the William Mulloy Library on Rapa Nui during the next year. We have established a liaison with Dr. Mario Castro, Sub-director of museums for the Dirección de Bibliotecas Archivos y Museos (DiBAM), in Chile, who is helping to facilitate our plans. While the opening date announced last year has been moved back to the year 2000 due to logistic problems, plans are moving forward for the completion of necessary building repairs, installation of shelving, shipment of books, and the purchase of other necessary materials. Original books, photos and manuscripts from the Mulloy collection will be sent to the library on the island.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS for the next EIF-sponsored conference, **Pacific 2000**, which will be held on the Big Island of Hawai'i, August 7–12, 2000. Dr. Peter Bellwood will be the keynote speaker, joining an outstanding group of scholars who will chair the various sessions (see listing on page 34). A brochure regarding the conference is now in preparation.

THE EIF BOARD VOTED IN MAY to support the upcoming voyage of the Polynesian sailing canoe, *Hōkūle'a*, which is expected to arrive on Easter Island in November. A check for \$2000 was presented to Nainoa Thompson and Pinkie Thompson by Brigid Mulloy and Fr. Francisco Nahoe, representing the Easter Island Foundation. EIF contributors can watch media coverage of the canoe's progress during the coming months and know they have contributed to the success of this historic